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ABSTRACT

This book is of the opinion that school reform does not reform schools. The reason is that reform movements conceptualize schools as transmitters of knowledge. The book asserts that, rather, schools are involved in the construction of meaning and morality in the lives of students and communities. Successful reform must, therefore, be based on an understanding of how schools construct moral life. The ethnography employs a sociology-of-knowledge approach to study two elementary schools: Rougemont, a historically African-American school that was closed during school desegregation in the 1970s, and Cedar Grove, a historically white school to which the former Rougemont students were sent. Data were gathered through oral histories, document analysis, and observation. The book describes the histories of the schools, the communities in which they are set, and some of the people who influenced and were influenced by the schools. Following the introductory chapter, chapter 2 provides an overview of popular philosophers in education who exemplify the oratorical idea. Chapter 3 provides an account of Cedar Grove School's social construction of virtue, and chapter 4 describes how the community of Rougemont portrayed its history differently from that of Cedar Grove. The fifth chapter revisits the orators' ideas about "great books" and philosophers' notions about the meaning of texts in ways of developing a different theory about the power of narrative. The chapter compares two books' impacts on the social construction of virtue, demonstrating the power of the narrative in the construction of morality and virtue. The final chapter first looks at the effects of school desegregation on the two schools and then moves to 1990. It suggests some possibilities for reclaiming moral life within schools. An index is included. (Contains 101 references.) (LMI)

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